

## THE LATIN LANGUAGE AND CULTURE ON ROMANIAN TERRITORY IN THE 11<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> CENTURIES

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### Abstract

Unlike the Central and Western Europe, where culture and civilization were expressed through Medieval Latin and native languages (each with their evolution stages), in Transylvania, Moldavia and Wallachia (situated at the crossroads between Orient and Occident) this duality took specific forms in which the Byzantine and Slavonic influences and those of different other western trends blended in an admirable cultural synthesis. This paper follows the most important evolutionary moments of the Latin language on Romanian territory, underlying the fact that, even being mostly under Byzantine and Slavonic cultural influences, Moldavia and Wallachia were (like Transylvania) connected to the western culture of Latin heritage through the contribution of the Catholic Church from the two neighbouring catholic kingdoms (Hungary and Poland) and through the diplomatic relationships with those kingdoms and with Italy, Germany and France.

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**Keywords:** Mediaeval latin culture, romanian principalities

### Introduction

The retreat of Roman authorities from Dacia at the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, the Great Migration, the important material destructions, the oblivion of city life and of the former administrative institutions (both juridical and cultural) of the Roman State generated unfavourable conditions for the development of culture and writing with a Latin alphabet as a basis for a lofty intellectual activity. And yet, the Romanised population, which continued to speak Latin and kept the contact with the Roman world on both shores of Danube, also knew and used the Latin writing at least until the 4<sup>th</sup> century. The fact that the eastern Roman Empire lost the southern regions of Dacia and Scythia Minor at the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> century, respectively the beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, explains the lack of written texts in Latin alphabet from 7<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> centuries in these areas.

### Main Text

#### Latin culture and language in transylvania

The premises for the Latin language culture in Transylvania were created by organizing the dioceses from Cenad, Oradea and Alba Iulia in the 11<sup>th</sup> century; by attributing territories to the Hungarian feudalism; by gradually assimilating the native feudalists, which converted to Catholicism and adopted Latin as the official language in order to keep their rights and privileges and to be able to climb the hierarchy of the Hungarian kingdom; by colonising an important number of Szekler and Germans (Transylvanian Saxons). The Latin culture from Transylvania developed and was strongly related to that in the Hungarian kingdom and, through it, to the culture from Central and Western Europe; yet unlike the occident, where the literary texts (meaning works of a religious nature, chronicles, scientific works, but also literary ones) were early and in great number, the most important monuments of the Medieval Latin in Transylvania were the non-literary texts, with a practical feature

only: diplomatic, juridical and private documents. Until the middle of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the issuing of these documents was modest. As equally modest was the copying of the liturgical books in the monasteries' *scriptoria*, because the Transylvanian catholic churches' need for books was met partly by bringing them from the west; in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries, the books of catholic churches were copied by educated clergymen in the workshops of the dioceses and in the *scriptoria* of the abbeys – the most important were the Benedictine abbeys from Cluj-Mănăştur and Sâniob Bihor (S. Jakó, R. Manolescu, 1970: 122-123).

The cultural monopoly held by the Catholic Church was reflected in the educated strata from Central and Eastern Europe (therefore in Transylvania too), almost exclusively represented by clergymen. Until the middle of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, at the University from Paris (the main centre where the catholic clergyman was given a superior education), is signalled the presence of students coming from these areas. At Paris studied the anonymous notary of king Bela III, and the royal notary Paul (later bishop of Transylvania), who wrote the royal act from 1181 that decided the written recording of the quarrels debated in the royal court (S. Jakó, R. Manolescu, 1970: 129). The cultural relationships with France were also maintained through the Cistercian monks and Premonstratensians which maintained written contacts with the tutelary monasteries from France<sup>117</sup>. Starting with the middle of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, when the cultural crisis of the Catholic Church worsened, the strong attraction exerted by the University of Paris started to decrease; instead, the influence of the Italian universities, which had a more laic orientation, strengthened – Bologna (the most important centre for juridical studies in the era), Padua and Ferrara. Gradually, the clergymen educated in the Italian schools replaced the "magistri of liberal arts", who were educated in the spirit of the French culture. With the rebirth of the cities and with the development of crafts and commerce, the area in which it was used and secularized the Latin writing grew larger and so, by the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> decade of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, Transylvania covered the gap which separated it from the European occident (S. Jakó, R. Manolescu, 1970: 128-129). The transformation that took place in the medieval mentality regarding writing and education (which started to be looked at as a means of self-sufficiency), a process manifested in the second half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century and at the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, contributed decisively to the cultural progress. This new idea, a direct result of society's development, is reflected by a wider spreading of written papers and by the upsurge of the document issuing activities. The purpose and reason of writing activities became laic, and the consequence of spreading of the written paper was the establishment of schools and forming of a social class of pen wielders – first secular clergymen<sup>118</sup> and, starting with the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, laic persons too (who attended Episcopal schools, in which a great attention was paid to the juridical education necessary for writing documents). The Episcopal schools from Transylvania were ruled by clergymen with academic education (*canonici lectores*<sup>119</sup>); in 1309, following a synodic decision, the *magistri* who taught in these schools had to have academic studies (S. Jakó, R. Manolescu, 1970: 73). Between the 14<sup>th</sup> and the 16<sup>th</sup> century, in the catholic schools organised within the Episcopal centres or within monasteries, and that had Latin as the teaching language, the students were taught in the same manner like in the western basic programs – elementary knowledge and the seven liberal arts divided in two cycles: *trivium*

<sup>117</sup> The Premonstratensians (The Order of Canons Regular of Prémontré) had, before 1224, monasteries at Dealul Orăzii, Abram Bihor, Almaşu and Meseş; the Cistercians were settled at Igriş Arad and Cârța Sibiu (S. Jakó, R. Manolescu, 1970: 130).

<sup>118</sup> Clergymen that, after completing their academic studies, didn't follow an ecclesiastical career, but activated for the benefit of laic society – respectively, they wrote documents, remaining priests only by name.

<sup>119</sup> These clergymen usually had a good juridical education; they were the ones who wrote the documents issued by the *loca credibilia* of the respective churches.

(which comprised grammar, rhetoric and dialectics) and *quadrivium* (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and music). These kind of schools existed in Alba Iulia, Oradea and Târgu Mureş.

Following the development of the cities, and the intense crafting and commercial activities, it became necessary to organize a new type of school, an intermediary educational school designed to meet the new demands, which would train a larger number of literate persons. The oldest news<sup>120</sup> available refer to the existence, in the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, of some city schools led by laic persons (usually a notary), which were appointed by the city council; these schools functioned first in the big crafting and commercial centres: Braşov, Sibiu, Cluj, Bistriţa, Baia Mare. Finally, there were also village schools, attested by documents, even from the first half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, which functioned around parishes; in these schools, the *scolares* and *scolastici* (clerks) taught the children religious notions, religious songs and probably elementary writing notions. The documents from the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century mention a large number of *litterati* (clerks) in the villages, even among serfs, and in the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century already there were numerous villager-clerks who drew the simplest documents, written in their native language (S. Jakó, R. Manolescu, 1970: 76-77).

For higher studies, the young people from Transylvania went to Prague, Krakow and Wien, where they came in contact with the big cultural and scientific trends of the era: in Prague they came in contact with the Hussite teachings; in Wien and Krakow with a culture which, on an old scholastic background, was under a growing humanist influence.

As pointed above, the oldest and numerous texts written in Latin were the diplomatic, juridical and private documents. In the 12<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, the chancellery that were issuing documents, both laic and ecclesiastical, were numerous: the chancellery of the voivode and vice-voivode; the chancellery of the Szekler's Count (*comes*); counties', cities', dioceses' chancelleries etc. A rich activity of elaborating written documents was held by the so-called confirmation places, specific medieval institutions organised within monasteries and *capitula*. Among them, the most important were de Episcopal *capitula* from Alba Iulia, Oradea and Cenad and the convents from Cluj-Mănăştur and Dealul Orăzii. The number of documents issued in Transylvania is considerable: if by 1200 were issued 31 documents, then between 1201 and 1250 – 265, between 1251 and 1300 – 524, between 1301 and 1350 – 2401, by the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century there were over 3700 documents; in the following centuries, the growing pace accelerated relative to the spreading of literacy. As a result, the documentary material before 1542 can be estimated at about 25000-30000 pieces, respectively pages (S. Jakó, R. Manolescu, 1970: 102).

The chancelleries had a dominant role not only in the practical use and the development of Latin writings, but also in the training of intellectuals and in the laic culture of Transylvania. “It is significant not only the fact that there are not known theological or religious works written by clergymen members in chancelleries, but also the fact that the authors of historiography, juridical science, political literature works, even literary prose and laic poetry from Transylvania (from those preserved) raised often from chancellery scholars.” (S. Jakó, R. Manolescu, 1970: 84)

The monasteries that had a more intense cultural activity, and later the *capitula* in which there were organised schools, were not only veritable centres of ecclesiastical erudition, but also centres of keeping and transmitting the classical Latin culture; in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, their libraries, and those of some parishes in the cities (often sheltered in settings especially built for them) comprised also, along with the majority of religious books, scientific books and classical Latin and Greek literature. It is known that the library of the Benedictine monastery from Cluj-Mănăştur, founded in the 11<sup>th</sup> century and destroyed

<sup>120</sup> The oldest information dates since 1387 and originates at Baia Mare: *iudex et iurati habeant constituere unum rectorem pro informatione puerorum valentem* (S. Jakó, R. Manolescu, 1970 : 75, n. 1).

around 1220, also had 54 codices around 1430; in 1442, the parish library from Sibiu had 138 handwritten books, the majority theological, but also tomes of natural sciences, Vergilius' poetry etc. (S. Jakó, R. Manolescu, 1970: 94-95; M. Dragomir, 2006: 43). The Episcopal library, respectively of the *capitulum* from Oradea, had an important number of books at the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, and so, before 1419, it was necessary the creation of a position of librarian (S. Jakó, R. Manolescu, 1970: 96). Between 1460 and 1465, when John Vitéz was provost and then bishop, this library became famous in the humanist circles, which borrowed from it only rare books (the known cardinal Sbigniev Olesnicki from Krakow asked in 1449 the works of Titus Livius and the works of Enea Silvio Piccolomini) (G. Ivaşcu, 1969: 57). Vespasiano da Bisticci, the owner of the most famous Florentine workshop for copying books, said about the library of Vitéz, founded to "enrich Dacia", that it contained "books that belonged to all branches of science" and that "there were few books in Latin that he [Vitéz] didn't had" (S. Jakó, R. Manolescu, 1970: 96). After the collection of Vitéz was embedded in Corvina Library, the library from Oradea continued to receive donations: bishop Valentine Farkas (between 1490 and 1495) donated 203 codices with various content, and Sigismund Thurzó (between 1506 and 1512), given his friendship with the famous venetian typographer Aldo Manuzi, enriched the library's stocks with printed editions of Greek and Latin classics.

The religious literature from Transylvania comprises hymns (some with an elevated poetic technique) and sermons, like the ones of Peter Nowag from Alba Iulia (dating from 1429-1435), or the ones of John Zekel from Sibiu (dating from 1502). The most famous sermons are the ones of the Franciscan monk Pelbart Temesvári, whose collection, named *Stellarium* or *Pomarium* was printed between 1498 and 1504.

The laic literature written in Latin is represented first by the historical works – chronicles. Among them can be mentioned: the final part of *Chronicon Dubnicense*, written maybe by a Romanian in 1479-1480; the writing of Georgius of Hungary, the so-called *Captivus Septemcastrensis* (the Transylvanian prisoner), dating from 1475-1480, named *Tractatus de ritu, moribus, condicionibus et nequitia Turcorum*, in which he describes his long captivity at the Turks, to which he fell in 1438 after the siege of Sebeş; he gives details about the expedition of sultan Murad in Transylvania and about the pro-Christian attitude of voivode Vlad the Devil; the memoirs of George Szerémi, written in 1544-1546 (*Epistola de perdicione regni Hungarorum*) which comprise especially information about the uprising led by Gheorghe Doja, in the époque of Zápolya and Martinuzzi.

The contact with the western European world, which was under the influence of humanist culture, has made its mark on Transylvania. The Transylvanian humanism, which developed first at the Episcopal courts, and then in the cities, was the one which prepared the way of the Reformation, by imprinting a preponderant laic content on the culture. The oldest centre with an important role in spreading the humanist culture in Transylvania formed at the Episcopal court from Oradea. Thanks to the activity of John Vitéz in his time as a provost, and then as a bishop, at Oradea were attracted many foreign humanists, and it was organised a veritable humanist circle that marked profoundly the local cultural creation. Vitéz was interested in music, natural sciences, he founded an astronomical observatory in Oradea, had philological preoccupations (proved by the improvements he made on some of the codices in his library).

Another important centre of humanist culture, that dates from the time of bishop Laszló Geréb (1475-1501), nephew of Mathias Corvin, and flourished in the time of bishop Francis Várdai (1514-1524), was the Episcopal court from Alba Iulia. The humanist tradition of this centre would be then taken over by the court of Transylvanian princes. The humanist circle from Alba Iulia was especially interested in the Roman inscriptions (studied by canon John Megyericsei) and in other monuments from the Antiquity. In the humanist group from

Alba Iulia most important personalities were, at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century and in the next one, John Lázói (a poet that imitated the models of Antiquity), Adrianus Wolphardus (editor of Ianus Pannonius' verses), Thomas Pelei, Stephanus Taurinus, and Antonius Verantius etc.

The most representative personality among Transylvanian humanists of Romanian descent was Nicolaus Olachus (1493-1568); his connections with the grand cultural personalities of the time, Belgians, Germans, Danish, Spanish, Italians, but especially with Erasmus of Rotterdam, ensues from the correspondence with them. In the ennoblement diploma from 1548, king Ferdinand underlines the special qualities of Olachus and the respect shown to him by the great personalities of the time: *Sic autem versatus es in Belgis, ut te hominem externum sumates iuxta et infimates omnes amarent, colerent et observarent, docti etiam homines, ob excellentem omnium bonarum artium cognitionem, ac linguarum Graecae et Latinae peritiam, dicendique et scribendi oratoriam simul et poeticam facultatem suspicerent et admirarentur.* "And you behaved in Belgium thus, that you, a foreigner, were loved and valued and respected by all, noblemen and commoners alike, even by cultivated people, thanks to your special knowledge of all good arts and Latin and Greek, and thanks to your talent to oratorical speech and poetic writing..." Nicolaus Olachus wrote epitaphs at the demise of Erasmus (1536) and other verses in Latin, the historical work *Hungaria* (in which he speaks also about the Latin origin of Romanians, offering rich historical, geographical and ethnographical information on Romanian Principalities), a *Chronicon* (in which are described the events from Mathias Corvin to Ferdinand I).

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, other cities from Transylvania, but especially Braşov, started to have an important role in the development of humanist culture. Representative for this is the activity of the humanist Johannes Honterus (Braşov, 1498-1549). He was the author of a Latin grammar spread throughout Europe in 14 editions, and of a *Cosmography* in prose (with an ulterior variant in verses, edited in 1541 in Braşov and 1546 in Zürich) – 17 editions. He founded in 1535 the first typography from Braşov and reorganised the local *gymnasium* on humanist principles; he printed for this gymnasium schoolbooks and collections of the works of great Antiquity authors in Latin, Greek and German. In his attempts to compile a set of laws, Honterus succeeded in 1544. His work was continued by Toma Bomelius and Matei Fronius, who finalised the Szekler's set of laws in *Statuta iurium municipalium Saxonum in Transylvania*, printed in 1583 (M. Dragomir, 2006: 47). Having as a basis the Roman law, John Baranyai Decsi (Ioannes Barovius Decius, 1560-1601) tried to reform the whole juridical system of Transylvania through his grand work named *Syntagma institutionum iuris* (1593). The writings known as *Breve Chronicon Daciae seu Annales templi Coronensis et Cibiniensis*, which were referring to the events from the 12<sup>th</sup> century and 1571, were written on multiple columns on the walls of the Black Church from Braşov and on those of the Dominican Church from Sibiu, and were saved by printing them in 1600 and 1746.

The consolidation of the Transylvanian Principality entailed the first works about state done by public people, with important jobs in the institutions of the time: Michael Siegler (Michael Sieglerus, first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century – 1585), notary of the Szekler community, author of an *Chronologia Rerum Hungaricarum*, which contains news regarding also Transylvania until 1563; Stephen Szamosközy (1565-1612), the official historiographer of Stephen Bocksaï and Sigismund Rákóczi, published roman inscriptions from Dacia while he was in Padua, where he furthered his studies, and he left a series of writings in Hungarian and three fragments in Latin in which he presents the society of the time and the events surrounding the entrance of Michael the Brave in Transylvania until his killing: *Libri* (1566-1586), *Pentades* (1598-1599) and *Hebdomades* (1603) (M. Dragomir, 2006: 48-50).

## The latin language and culture in moldavia and wallachia

After Transylvania was included in the Latin culture area, it's influence extended in the two Romanian principalities, Moldavia and Wallachia, where the Latin language and writing are beginning to be used in the 13<sup>th</sup> century first by the catholic clergymen (Hungarian and Transylvanian German colonists), and then in the princely and town chancelleries too. For the internal necessities, the Latin language was used by the Catholic Church, by the catholic inhabitants (especially Germans and Hungarians) and by some higher level schools. There are tombstones with inscriptions written in Latin, like the one of count Laurence from Câmpulung, which dates from 1300, or those of some catholic inhabitants of German origin from Baia and Suceava, dating from 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> centuries. Although the official language of the written culture in the two Romanian Principalities was Church Slavonic, Latin was the language of the external, both official and private, relationships. Some of the researchers<sup>121</sup> claim that a Latin Department existed within the princely chancelleries from Wallachia and Moldavia starting with the second half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century; yet, the number of preserved documents is low. Only in the next century, following the establishment of a central chancellery, the formalizing of the Latin notary position, and of the amplifying of the relations of Moldavia and Wallachia with the Latin culture states, the diplomatic activity in Latin becomes constant, and the number of written documents increases considerably (N. Grămadă, 1935: 154; M. Paraschiv, 2004: 24). Even if they were evidently fewer than the immense mass of the internal Church Slavonic documents, the Latin ones show an active diplomatic life and permanent relationships with Transylvania, Hungary, the Roman-German Empire, Poland, The Holy See etc. There are thousands of Latin documents preserved in the Romanian and foreign archives: political treaties, commercial privileges, and also a vast correspondence, all issued in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries by the princely chancelleries, by town councils, by high officials or private individuals.

Sporadically, the Latin language was used for writing some works, especially for ones with religious content. Therefore Nicholas, catholic bishop of Siret (1413-1428), made a theological compendium. Also, in cities from Wallachia and Moldavia (Târgoviște, Câmpulung, Suceava, Bacău, Baia, Chilia etc.) existed Dominican and Franciscan monasteries endowed with libraries that contained books handwritten and printed in Latin. Once the respective monasteries ceased to exist, the stocks of books of these libraries were scattered, especially in the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century; but fragments of these stocks ended up in Transylvania, where are stored to this day. By researching these fragments, it could be deduced that, starting with the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the Franciscan monasteries from Bacău and Baia had quite important libraries. For example, there was preserved a codex on paper which contained scholastic works; it was copied in 1467 in one of the catholic monasteries from Moldavia for the use of Vicar Francis of Baia, and it was used later on in a monastery from Chilia. In the library of the monastery from Bacău there was attested the existence of a tome of Dominican sermons, issued at Nürnberg in 1492.<sup>122</sup>

The educational teaching of the Latin language in the two Romanian Principalities was represented first by *Schola Latina* from Cotnari<sup>123</sup> (Moldavia), established in 1563 at the initiative of Jacob Despot Heraclides. Within the Cotnari establishment, which had the

<sup>121</sup>D. Ciurea, "Le scritte latine nei Paesi Romeni. Saggio di paleografia e di diplomatica", Roma, 1940, p. 38; idem, "Observații pe marginea documentelor latine românești", extras din Apulum, II, 1943-1945, Alba-Iulia, 1945, p. 1, 5; idem, "Diplomatica latină în Țările Române. Noi contribuții", în Anuarul Institutului de Istorie și Arheologie "A.D.Xenopol", VIII, Iași, 1971, p. 3,9,11; Mihaela Paraschiv, Documentele latine de cancelarie din Moldova (sec. XIV-XVIII). Studiu lingvistic și stilistic, Iași, 2004, p. 24.

<sup>122</sup>S. Jakó, R. Manolescu, cited work., p. 95; 135

<sup>123</sup>For details see Maria Marinescu-Himu, "Contribuții la istoricul limbii latine în țara noastră", în Studii Clasice, V, 1963, reedited in the commemorative volume Dialoguri culturale româno-grecești. Studii, București, 2004, p. 67-78.

feature of an elementary and middle school, the students learned grammar for three years; next, there were two years of rhetoric and dialectics. The rhetoric courses aimed at forming the skill to write royal charters, diplomatic papers, letters etc.; the dialectics courses introduced the students to the Aristotelian logic. The ultimate purposefulness of those two disciplines was to prepare the students *ad dicendum et iudicandum*.

In the next century, at the academic school from Târgoviște (Wallachia), led by professor Pantelimon Ligaridis, Latin education knows great flourishing. Unlike *Schola Latina* from Cotnari, the humanistic school from Târgoviște was a superior one, through its lessons of Latin and Greek, and all its activity; it prepared the era of an intense cultural activity inaugurated after 1679 by the steward Șerban Cantacuzino, himself a former student of the school.

### Conclusion

The succinct presentation of the Latin writings from the Romanian territory between 11<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries proves that the three Romanian Principalities were always connected to the Western culture, and that the language and culture of Latin heritage were a constant presence in Romanian civilization.

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